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The Pope repeats that ecumenism is a journey and praises the vitality of the young Churches

After his homily, the Pope answered several questions posed to him by members of the Anglican congregation present. The following is an extensive summary.

Question: *“During our liturgy, many people come to our Church and are surprised that it ‘seems just like a Catholic church!’. Many Catholics have heard of King Henry VIII, but are unaware of Anglican traditions and the ecumenical progress made during this last half-century. What would you say to them about the relationship between Catholics and Anglicans today?”*

Pope Francis: “It is true, the relationship between Catholics and Anglicans is good today, and we love each other like brothers! It is true that in history there are ugly things everywhere, and tearing out a piece of history and displaying it as if it were an ‘icon’ of our relationship is not right. An historical fact must be interpreted in the hermeneutics of that moment, not with another ... And nowadays the relationship is good. ... But also in the saints, we have a common tradition of saints. ... And nothing, nothing in the two Churches, the two traditions, has rejected the saints, the Christians who have given Christian witness up to that point. And this is important. But there were also relationships of brotherhood in difficult times, when political, economic and religious power were so mixed, when there was the rule *‘cuius region eius religio’*.”

In Argentina I met an elderly Jesuit, when I was young ... of English family, and he had been an altar boy in the city of Rosario in the funeral of Queen Victoria, in the Anglican Church. There was that relationship in those times too. And the relations between Catholics and Anglicans are relations – I don’t know if historically this can be said, but it is a figure that helps us to think – of two steps ahead, half a step backwards. ... This is human. And we must continue in this.

There is another thing that has kept strong the connection between our religious traditions: the monks and monasteries. And monks, both Catholic and Anglican, are a great spiritual force in our traditions.

And the relations, as I wanted to say, have improved even more. ... ‘But we don’t do all the same things...’. But

we journey together, we go together. For now, that is good. Every day has its own concerns”.

Question: *“Your predecessor, Benedict XVI, warned against the risk, in ecumenical dialogue, of prioritising collaboration in social activity in place of following the more demanding path of theological agreement. It seems that you favour the contrary, or rather, journeying and working together to reach the goal of Christian unity. Is this true?”*

Pope Francis: “I do not know the context in which Pope Benedict said this, and therefore it is difficult to answer, it is embarrassing. ... Perhaps it was in a discussion with theologians. But I am not sure. Both aspects are important. ... Which of the two takes priority? ... And on the other hand there is the famous remark from the Patriarch Athenagoras – which is true, because I asked Patriarch Bartholomaios and he confirmed it – when he said to Blessed Paul VI, “Let us make unity together and leave the theologians on an island to think about it”. It was a joke, but it is historically true. ... But, what is the core of this? Because I think that what Pope Benedict XVI said is certain: it is necessary to engage in theological dialogue to go in search of the roots ... about the Sacraments, about many things on which we still do not agree. But this cannot be done in a laboratory: it must be done by journeying together, along the way. We are on a journey and on the path we also have these discussions. Theologians do this. But in the meantime we help each other, in our needs, in our life, even spiritually we help each other. For example, in twinning there was the fact of studying Scripture together, and we help each other in the service of charity, in service to the poor, in hospitals, in wars. This is so important. ... It is not possible to engage in static ecumenical dialogue. Ecumenical dialogue is done in journeying, because ecumenical dialogue is a journey, and theological matters are discussed while on the way. I believe that this betrays neither the thought of Pope Benedict, nor the reality of ecumenical dialogue. I interpret in this way”.

Question: *“All Saints Church began as a group of British faithful, but now it is an international congregation with people from different countries. In some regions of Africa, Asia and the Pacific, ecumenical relations between Churches are better and more creative than here in Europe. What can we learn from the example of the Churches in the South of the world?”*

Pope Francis: “It is true. The young Churches have a different vitality, because they are young. And they seek a way of expressing themselves differently. ... The young Churches have more creativity, and at the beginning here in Europe it was the same. When you read, for instance, in the *Didaché*, of how the Eucharist was celebrated, the encounter between Christians, there was a great creativity. As she grew, the Church became more consolidated and matured to an adult age. But the young Churches have more vitality and also have a need to collaborate. ... For example, my collaborators and I am studying the possibility of a trip to South Sudan. Why? Because the bishops – the Presbyterian, the Anglican, and the Catholic, all three – came together to say to me, ‘Please, come to South Sudan, just for one day, but do not come alone, come with Justin Welby’, that is, with the Archbishop of Canterbury. From there, from the young Church, this creativity has come. And we are thinking about whether this can be done, if the situation is too grave there. ... But we must do this because all three of them want peace, and they work together for peace”.

“There is a very interesting anecdote. When Blessed Paul VI beatified the martyrs of Uganda – a young Church – among the martyrs – catechists, all of them, young – some were Catholics and others Anglican, and they were all martyred by the same king, in hatred of the faith and because they did not want to follow the king’s obscene proposals. And Paul VI was embarrassed, because he said, ‘I must beatify all of them, they are all martyrs’. But in that moment in the Catholic Church, it was not really possible to do that. The Council had just taken place. ... But that young Church now celebrates all of them together; Paul VI too, in his homily for the Mass for beatification wished to name the Anglican catechists as martyrs for the faith at the same level as the Catholic catechists. This was done by a young Church. Young Churches have courage, because they are young”.

“And then, my experience. I was close friends with the Anglicans in Buenos Aires, because the area behind the Merced parish was connected with the Anglican cathedral. The bishop Gregory Venables was a good friend of mine. ... But there is another experience: in the north of Argentina there are Anglican missions with aborigines, and the Anglican and Catholic bishops there worked together, and taught. And when people could not go to the Catholic celebration on a Sunday they went to the Anglican one, and the Anglicans went to the Catholic one,

because they did not want to spend Sunday without a celebration, and they worked together. And here the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith knows. They carry out charitable work together, the two bishops are friends, and the two communities are friends”.

“I think this is a wealth that our young Churches can bring to Europe and to the Churches with a long tradition. And they give to us the solidity of a tradition that is very, very refined and well thought out. It is true that ecumenism is easier in the young Churches. ... But I believe that ... ecumenism is more solid in theological research in a more mature Church, which has matured in research, in the study of history, of theology, of liturgy, like the Church in Europe. And I believe that it would be good for us, for both Churches: from here, from Europe, to send some seminarians to have pastoral experiences in the young Churches. They come from the young Churches to study in Rome, at least the Catholics, we know. But to send them to see, to learn from the young Churches, would be a great wealth. ... Ecumenism is easier there ... which does not mean that it is more superficial. ... They do not negotiate faith and identity. That aborigine in the north of Argentina says to you, ‘I am Anglican’. But there isn’t a bishop, there isn’t a pastor. ... ‘I want to praise God on a Sunday, and so I go to the Catholic cathedral’, and vice versa. These are the riches of the young Church”.
